

Grant will support marketing campaign for Vermont wood products

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Vermont's forest products industry will receive a \$1 million federal grant to market its products, officials said Monday.

The two-year grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration will be used to promote wood products, such as furniture, wooden cutting boards and bowls, on a state Web page and to place them in lodgings across the state.

The money also will support an industry presence at trade shows, nationally and internationally, and aid factory tours, open studios, and an annual design competition and show that highlight Vermont-made wood products.

Better marketing of those products will lead to more jobs and expand Vermont's brand of quality, officials said.

"The producers of wood products represent a tremendous value to the state of Vermont," said Paul Costello, executive director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development. "Their products are sold as exports drawing dollars in to the state. They're profoundly important in the economics of supporting the working landscape in the state of Vermont. But just as importantly, like Vermont (agricultural) products, they represent and build the Vermont brand identity."

According to a report by the Vermont Forest Products Council, Vermont's wood industry made up 18,463 direct and indirect jobs in 2000, or about 6.2 percent of the state's total jobs.

Wood products manufacturers traditionally have been entrepreneurs who work in both small and large shops to produce quality goods that Vermont is known for, officials said. In recent years, they've faced international competition.

"I really think it's going to make a difference," Gov. James Douglas said of the grant. "It's going to help us grow the economy of our state, provide more jobs, and let the world know of the outstanding products that are made here in Vermont."

The first \$450,000 will be distributed this year. Of that, \$125,000 will be allocated to marketing the brand; \$125,000 to promote the brand at trade shows; \$100,000 to support an annual showcase and design competition; \$50,000 to create a presence in lodges; and \$50,000 to develop an open studio and factory tour program.

Cabot Cooperative Creamery has agreed to match grant money used to develop a marketing program, including a Web site, advertising, public relations and special events. The state Department of Tourism and Marketing also will promote the wood products along with its regular advertising and marketing.

The projects will start Jan. 1, 2006.

"I feel strong and secure now, especially when this project is going forward with the speed that it is," said Sen. James Jeffords, who helped to secure the grant. "We're all going to benefit."